



**SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL STATEMENT TO THE
18TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON
INDIGENOUS ISSUES (UNPFII),
DELIVERED BY THE
DEPUTY MINISTER OF COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND
TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS, MR OBED BAPELA
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Agenda Item 9: “Traditional knowledge: generation, transmission and protection”

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Madame Chair
Sanibonani, Dumelang

Greetings to All Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum

Traditional and indigenous knowledge remains of priority to South Africa. Notwithstanding, the strides made globally in the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples, there remains worrisome trends regarding the challenges faced by indigenous peoples and their communities, including in protecting their cultures, heritage and traditional knowledge. The exploitation of indigenous traditional knowledge by non-indigenous actors, continues to negatively impact; the social and economic status of indigenous communities, their lands and territories as well as their livelihoods.

Marking the 25th anniversary of our young democracy, South Africa has worked hard to redress the legacies of an exploitative past where traditional knowledge was suppressed and stolen without Free, Prior and Informed Consent. We condemn these exploitative actions which have gone unabated with impunity without communities benefitting from the knowledge they possess. This impunity goes against the letter and spirit of Article 31 of the UNDRIP. For these reasons South Africa continues to advocate for the elaboration of a legally binding instrument on the rights of indigenous peoples.

The contribution of indigenous and traditional knowledge systems to sustainable development cannot be over emphasized; these systems significantly contribute to, among others, environmental conservation, sustainable use of biodiversity, food security, and sustainable agriculture. If we are to reach the goals agreed to in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, indigenous and traditional knowledge systems need to be respected.

Madam Chair,

South Africa believes that indigenous knowledge systems contributes positively to the socio-economic development of the country, this has culminated in the development of our Indigenous Knowledge Systems [IKS] policy of 2004. This years theme, comes at an opportune time in the context of our national discourse with the recent promulgation of

the “Protection, Promotion, Development and Management of Indigenous Knowledge Bill” which includes the establishment of the National Indigenous Knowledge Systems Office. Furthermore, the rich endowment of traditional knowledge plays a critical role in our health care, culture, religion, identity, environment and trade. In this regard, the Government has taken the following key measures:

1. The Department of Trade and Industry initiated amendments of intellectual property legislation to bring it in line with the objectives of the IKS Policy, to include the protection of traditional knowledge of an individual, and traditional community; benefitting the knowledge holders,
2. The Department of Health has developed a Traditional Health Practitioners mandate for the establishment of a regulatory body entitled the ‘Traditional Health Practitioners Council’ aimed at among others, overseeing the regulation of traditional medicine products and promote and develop interest in traditional health practice by encouraging research, education & training. In this regard, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, has in the recent past, paid out royalties to the African Traditional Healers Trust whose traditional knowledge led to the discovery and commercialization of a mosquito repellent candle;
3. Finally, Madam Chair With regards to biological diversity, the government has been facilitating, supporting and providing oversight into the development and finalization of a Benefit Sharing Agreement between the Khoi-San community and the Rooibos Tea industry for the use of traditional knowledge. South Africa has to date approved six benefit-sharing Agreements, negotiated and concluded between the Khoi-San communities and the Industries for the commercial utilization of their traditional knowledge;

Thank you